



TRANSPORTATION SAFETY & ADVISORY COMMISSION

CITY OF HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA

TO: Transportation Safety & Advisory Commission Members, Council members, City Manager Kurt Hodgen

FROM: Brad Reed, Transportation Planner

DATE: April 8, 2011

RE: Transportation Safety & Advisory Commission Summary from April 6, 2011 Meeting

The Transportation Safety & Advisory Commission met on Wednesday April 6, 2011 at 9:00AM in City Council Chambers at the Community Development Building, 409 South Main Street.

Members and Advisory Members present included: Bill Blessing (Chair), Brad Reed (Public Works), Drew Williams (Public Works), Len Van Wyk (citizen member), Russell Presnell (citizen member), MPO Greg Deeds (Police member), Sgt. William Keller (Police), Reggie Smith (Public Transportation), Doug Stader (DMV), Lee Eshelman (JMU), Chief Larry Shifflett (Fire), Deputy Chief Ian Bennett (Fire)

Guests Present: Jeff Mellott (Daily News-Record)

Citizens are always provided the opportunity to voice their views/concerns about any item before the commission. It is the policy of the Commission to move the agenda item to the beginning of the meeting when citizens attend Commission meetings to avoid detaining citizens for the entire meeting. However, any citizen is welcome to stay for the entire meeting.

Welcome

New Business

1. Welcome to Fire Department advisory members

Mr. Blessing introduced Chief Shifflett and Deputy Chief Bennett of the Fire Department, who were welcomed as advisory members of the Commission. The Commission agreed to formally request representation from the Fire Department at its previous meeting.

2. Crosswalk at S Main Street & Newman Avenue

Mr. Van Wyk requested that a crosswalk be installed to cross S Main Street at Newman Avenue to improve pedestrian safety. Mr. Reed explained that this improvement is already integrated into the Streetscape Phase II project, which is currently under design, but not yet funded. Since there are not currently ADA curb ramps at this location, it would be more cost efficient to wait for the Streetscape project to complete this work while sidewalks are being improved.

3. Stop bar on Reservoir Street at E Market Street

Mr. Van Wyk suggested that the stop bar on Reservoir Street be moved forward closer to E Market Street. Since westbound left turns are restricted on E Market Street, there is no need to accommodate the radii of left turning vehicles. Mr. Reed explained that Public Works is looking into this matter to see if a change can be made. Moving the stop bar would reduce delay at the traffic signal by shortening the distance vehicles need to travel to clear the intersection and would also shorten the extent of the queue on Reservoir Street. A report of staff findings will be shared with the Commission at the next meeting.

4. Speed limit change on Old Furnace Road

Mr. Reed shared staff's findings from a recent speed study on Old Furnace Road, which was conducted to determine appropriate and safe speed zones in the 25 mph section between Vine Street and Blue Ridge Drive. Speeds were measured on Old Furnace Road near Vine Street in the current 25 mph zone and it was found that vehicles traveling westbound had an 85th percentile speed of 43 mph, while vehicles traveling eastbound had an 85th percentile speed of 40 mph. Mr. Reed explained that speed limits are typically set as close as possible to the free flow 85th percentile speed, as it is an indication of what motorists feel to be the reasonable, safe speed for that roadway.

Mr. Reed shared staff's recommendation to increase the speed limit from 25 mph to 35 mph for an approximately 1000 foot distance from a point about 200 feet before Blue Ridge Drive (where it currently changes to 45 mph) and a point about 250 feet before the entrance to East Brook Manor apartments. It is recommended that the speed after this point remain 25 mph to accommodate the poor sight distance from the East Brook Manor entrance and that the speed before Blue Ridge Drive remain 45 mph. Staff's reasoning for this change is related to the high

speeds observed in the 25 mph section and the recognition that 25 mph is too slow a speed for the straightaway section in front of The Eagle's Lodge. Graduating the speed decrease for motorists traveling westbound is expected to encourage compliance, as the speed zones recommended more closely reflect reasonable travel speeds than do the current zones.

While the Commission was generally in agreement with this change, Sgt. Keller suggested consideration of decreasing the posted speed to 35 mph for the entire existing 45 mph zone. Mr. Reed agreed to measure speeds near Smithland Road and Oriole Lane to examine how reasonable it would be to expect motorists to travel 35 mph on that section of roadway. The Commission recommended that staff proceed with this study and report back at the May meeting.

Old Business

5. Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program - Old Town update

Mr. Williams explained that a meeting with Old Town neighborhood representatives will be held on Thursday April 7th to discuss traffic calming improvements that will be integrated into this year's maintenance schedule. The representatives will be informed that the Fire Department is not in support of adding on street parking on Franklin Street due to the limited road width, so that component of the plan will be removed. Mr. Williams went on to explain that the first improvements to be installed will be a raised intersection at Franklin Street & Ott Street and a speed hump on Bruce Street between Ott Street and Myers Avenue. Both of these improvements were named by the neighborhood as being top priorities and will be implemented when Ott Street is paved this summer.

6. Traffic signal changes on South Main Street and Cantrell Avenue

Mr. Reed shared staff's recommended changes to three signalized intersections near JMU that, if approved, would go into effect after JMU gates the campus this summer.

For S Main Street & Grace Street, it was recommended that the current 'No Right Turn on Red' restriction be changed to only include those hours of the day when pedestrian traffic is heavy. A placard would be installed below the 'No Right Turn on Red' sign that reads 'Mon-Fri 7:30 AM – 7:30 PM'. These times were chosen by Public Works staff after video analysis of pedestrian

traffic volumes. Outside of these times, pedestrian traffic is low and vehicles would be able to more efficiently navigate the intersection. There was discussion about the effectiveness of removing the right turn on restriction altogether and installing a pictorial 'Right Turn Traffic Yield to Pedestrians' sign. Mr. Reed explained that this had been considered by staff, but it was decided that there might be too many conflicts caused by allowing right turns on red. The Commission agreed with the staff recommendation for the time restricted right turn on red, but recommended that staff develop a criteria for locations at which the 'Right Turn Traffic Yield to Pedestrians' sign might be used, anticipating that they will be frequently requested if they are seen by the public.

For S Main Street & Bluestone Drive, Mr. Reed recommended that the exclusive crosswalk movement be removed along with the right turn on red restrictions. This recommendation was made with the consideration that pedestrian volumes have decreased since the viaduct was constructed and that pedestrian volumes are at a level that would be safely supported by standard signalized crosswalks at all four legs of the intersection. Mr. Reed explained that it is not possible to accurately predict the changes in travel patterns for pedestrians and motorists after Bluestone Drive is gated. For this reason, it was suggested that potential pedestrian-vehicle conflicts for the eastbound (Warsaw Avenue) right turn movement be watched closely to determine the future need for the use of a leading pedestrian interval. The Commission agreed with these recommendations, but chose to recommend for the implementation of a leading pedestrian interval for the eastbound approach in coordination with the other changes due to concerns about the right turn conflicts voiced by Mr. Van Wyk. These changes would significantly improve the performance of the traffic signal and allow better progression between signals for traffic on S Main Street.

A leading pedestrian interval gives pedestrians an advance walk signal before the adjacent motorists get a green light, giving the pedestrian several seconds to start in the crosswalk where there is a concurrent signal (such as for a right turn/thru movement). This makes pedestrians more visible to motorists and motorists more likely to yield to them. This advance crossing phase approach has been used successfully in several places, such as New York City, for two decades and studies have demonstrated reduced conflicts for pedestrians.

For S Mason Street & Cantrell Avenue, Mr. Reed recommended that the exclusive crosswalk movement be removed along with the restriction for right turns on red. It was also recommended that leading pedestrian intervals be implemented for northbound and southbound crosswalks to minimize pedestrian-vehicle conflicts caused by right turns off of S Mason Street, which were found to be high enough to be of concern to staff. This recommendation was made with the consideration that pedestrian volumes are at a level that would be safely supported by standard signalized crosswalks at all four legs of the intersection. Currently, about 95% of pedestrian cross northbound or southbound, with very few people crossing diagonally or north-south. The Commission agreed with these recommendations. These changes would reduce delays for both motorists and pedestrians at this traffic signal.

Other Business/ Announcements

7. Chicago Avenue Corridor Study Public Meeting

Mr. Williams announced that there will be a Public Meeting for the Chicago Avenue Corridor Study on Tuesday April 19th from 6-8 PM at Park View Mennonite Church. He also shared that the study includes consideration of roundabouts at the intersections of Chicago Avenue & Waterman Drive and Chicago Avenue & Mt. Clinton Pike/Park Road.

8. New legislation for bikes, motorcycles, and mopeds

Mr. Reed announced that an amendment to § 46.2-833 of Virginia law was recently passed that impacts bikes, motorcycles, and mopeds waiting at traffic signals. This law will take effect July 1, 2011. This amendment reads as follows:

“Notwithstanding any other provision of law, if a driver of a motorcycle or moped or a bicycle rider approaches an intersection that is controlled by a traffic light, the driver or rider may proceed through the intersection on a steady red light only if the driver or rider (i) comes to a full and complete stop at the intersection for two complete cycles of the traffic light or for two minutes, whichever is shorter, (ii) exercises due care as provided by law, (iii) otherwise treats the traffic control device as a stop sign, (iv) determines that it is safe to proceed, and (v) yields the right of way to the driver of any vehicle approaching on such other highway from either direction.”

Mr. Reed explained that this change may have taken place to allow users of two-wheeled vehicles and bikes a legal bypass of a red light at a traffic signal that is not responding to their presence. This problem is typically associated with the use of ground loops to detect vehicles at a signal. Since Harrisonburg has only two locations with this type of detection, with the vast majority of signals instead using cameras to detect, this law isn't expected to cause many changes to motorist actions at our traffic signals. The use of cameras for detection allows City staff to adjust how users are detected at a traffic signal, with flexibility to shift detection areas to accommodate two-wheeled vehicles and bikes.

9. Bicycle & Pedestrian Subcommittee update

Mr. Reed & Mr. Williams shared updates from the March 28th meeting of the Bicycle & Pedestrian Subcommittee. The Subcommittee recommended that sharrows be installed on Park Road from Dogwood Drive to Birch Drive in lieu of bike lanes. This decision was made because unanimous support was not received from the neighborhood to remove on-street for the bike lanes. Safety improvements at the intersection of Chicago Avenue & Waterman Drive were completed in March and include a new crosswalk across Waterman Drive at the shared use path, painting to tighten up the turn from southbound Chicago Avenue to westbound Waterman Drive, and appropriate adjustments to the stop bar and stop sign for the eastbound Waterman Drive approach.

10. Taxi stand request for Rocktown Beer & Music Festival

Mr. Presnell requested that City staff consider marking off a designated area on S Liberty Street for a taxi stand at the Rocktown Beer & Music Festival on April 23rd. The Commission agreed that this would be a good idea and Mr. Williams agreed to have staff look into the details.

11. Left turn restriction at W Fairview Avenue

Mr. Blessing asked if the Fire Department has given consideration to working with Public Works to implement a physical left turn restriction at the intersection of W Fairview Avenue & S Main Street to prevent unsafe left turns onto and off of W Fairview Avenue. The Fire Department has had concerns about such a restriction in the past, as it might impede emergency vehicle response. Options such as a mountable curb are under consideration to restrict turns while still allowing access by emergency responders. Chief Shifflett agreed that such a solution would be

workable and that the Fire Department will discuss the matter with Public Works. Deputy Chief Bennett mentioned that there is currently a mountable curb on JMU property that hasn't been a problem for fire truck access.

Adjourn